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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that investigated the relationship between schools and communities. Each of the 10 schools under study served predominantly low-socioeconomic Mexican-American students. Data were derived from interviews and observations conducted at 8 of the 10 schools. Findings show that the schools' relationships with their communities followed three models: the community as resource for the school; the community and school as an integrated unit; and the school as a locus for a learning community. The three schools that interacted with the community as a resource tended to serve highly fragmented communities facing such problems as gangs, poverty, unemployment, and single-parent families. The three schools were dependent on the community. Two schools were integrated with community and one school proactively initiated an extended learning environment with the community. The two integrated schools were characterized by a great degree of overlap between the schools and their surrounding culture. However, the schools' very traditional contexts are difficult to replicate in postindustrial, late-20th century communities. The proactive school viewed itself as a resource for the entire community, participated in the community, and made adult education a priority. Factors of successful school-community relationships include the provision of opportunities for participation, a collegial school administration, and constant communication. (LMI)

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SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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ED 390 168

Introduction

The focus of this section of the Effective Border School Research and Development Initiative was to investigate the relationship that exists between the schools in the study and the communities in which they reside. All of the schools that we visited serve predominantly low SES, Mexican - American students.

To this point in time we have conducted interviews and observations at eight of the ten schools selected in the study. In this present description of our section of the research we include data from only six of the schools because these school most clearly articulated their relationship with the communities in which they reside.

Three Models of School-Community Interaction

Schools in this study seem to have developed relationships with their communities that fall into one of three basic models: the community as resource for the school, the community and school as an integrated unit, and the school as a locus for a learning community. The models of community as resource for the school and the school as a locus for a learning community were present in

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schools in highly fragmented communities, high transience, low student socio-economic status, and a high proportion of single parent families. The model of school and community as an integrated unit was present in highly traditional communities.

1) Community as Resource

Three of the schools that we examined go out to the community in order to ask for financial, material, and personnel from local organizations, agencies, businesses. Table 1 gives an overview of the school level, context, and rate of growth.

Table 1

Name of School	Type	Context	Growth
O'Connor	Middle School	Urban	Moderate
Johnson	Elementary School	Urban	Moderate
Elmer Sutherland	Middle School	Urban	High

A) O'Connor Middle School

Of the three schools that work out of the model of community as resource, O'Connor Middle School has the most concrete vision and plan for how the school will interact with the community. For instance, the school, through the efforts of the school counselor, has a very close working relationship with a professor from the local university who has obtained a large grant to fund mathematics and science programs in local public schools. As a consequence, of this the

school has been able to institute weekend and summer science and math academies and provide a great deal of enrichment for their students in these areas.

This school also puts a great deal of emphasis on making its students aware of careers and what they need to do in order to prepare for them. The goals are to make the students aware of the practical need of staying in school and getting an education. It also shows students the ultimate practicality of what they are studying vis-a-vis future earning potential. The highlight of this effort is Career Day. For this event the school invites 150 members of the community from a variety of professions to spend the day with the students talking to them about what they do, and what they would need to do to prepare themselves to do particular jobs.

B) Johnson Elementary School

The most significant thing that Johnson did to get the community involved in the school was to become an "affiliate" with as many businesses as they could. It had become a partner with over twenty businesses in town. These partnerships consisted of activities like getting "goodies" from such businesses as pizza parlors, fast food restaurants, and merchants and using these "goodies" to provide rewards and incentives to good students.

We were told that the previous principal was good at "hitting the streets" in order to get support from local businesses. They were proud of the fact that they had many more "affiliates" than any of the other schools in the district.

C) Elmer Sutherland Junior High

Elmer Sutherland is experiencing tremendous growth and thus serves a wide variety of students from across the economic and social spectrum. There has been a large influx of Mexican nationals in the last several years and this has caused the school to make a number of changes in the curriculum in order to accommodate these students such as additional ESL classes. The principal is concerned about doing all he can to maintain a calm environment free from any violence.

The school nurse and counselor described interacting intensively with the community in order to get health and counseling services for their students. They said they did not worry much about the migrant students and Chapter 1 students since they had resources to deal with their health and social service needs. However, they were concerned about those students who did not qualify for special programs, about 30% of the student population.

Their contact with the community consisted of calling the Lions' Club for glasses for students and making appointments for physical examinations for students at the local hospital. They also obtained counseling services for their students at a local mental health center. They both mentioned being constantly on the phone advocating for the health and social service needs of their children. This collaboration with local health care practitioners, rather than being planned and systematic appeared to be ad hoc, depending on the particular student and her particular problem.

D) Summary

The three schools described in this section initiate an interaction with the community in order to garner financial and material resources for programs that the school wants to implement. In addition, it requests assistance from community members to enhance the curriculum that the school has decided is important for the education of its students. In other words, the school reaches out to the community, and the community either responds or not, as it is able. These schools have formed relationships with the community which are typically described in school-community research literature.

2) Community and School as Integrated Unit

Two of the schools we investigated were unusually well-integrated with their communities. Table 2 gives an overview of the school level, context, and rate of growth.

Table 2

Name of School	Type	Context	Growth
Zaragoza	High School	Rural	Moderate
Kuwalski	Elementary School	Urban	Moderate

A) Zaragoza High School

Zaragoza High School was described by one of its counselors as a "Leave it to Beaver." Indeed, the community had shown very little change over the years and, in fact, was relatively isolated from other border communities on either the U.S. or Mexican sides of the border. The school seemed to be a microcosm of the community, making it difficult to say where the school ends and where the community begins. As a number of people told us, "The school is the most attractive place in the community for the kids. There is really nothing else in the community for the kids". Children are helped to understand at an early age that the town of Zaragoza offers few employment opportunities. Therefore, it is not surprising that 80 - 85 % of the high school students go on for post secondary education of some kind.

There is very high community involvement an all three of the schools in the Zaragoza Independent School District. The business owners in town sponsor scholarships for Zaragoza high school students to go to college. They also donate services and goods for the activities that go on in the school.

Time seems to have passed Zaragoza by. They experience few if any, consequences of the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement due to the fact that they have no direct ties to Mexico (i.e,. a bridge) and there is not one foot of railroad track in the county. They are not experiencing a vast influx of Mexican

immigrants as are other schools in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and they have almost no problems with gangs.
Also, because of its geographic isolation, Zaragoza is not experiencing overwhelming and unsustainable growth the way other high schools in the Valley are. The teachers in the school know all of the students and it is easy to imagine that students feel a strong sense of belonging here.

Zaragoza reminds one of the typical small town school of yesteryear. It is insulated from the problems of a rapidly growing and mobile population, and the town has a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the success of the school. Because of it unique context its seeming anachronistic quality, it is very likely that other communities would find it impossible to create the school-community interaction that Zaragoza has had for many years.

B) Kuwalski Elementary School

The culture of Kuwalski Elementary is clearly Mexican-American. Mexican national holidays are enthusiastically celebrated and parents talk of walking their children to school and preparing food for them as significant nurturing activities. When the principal was asked what she hopes for her students, she responded by saying that "I want them to be good citizens and to be productive in the community", a response ore characteristic of a highly traditional culture than the individualistic and achievement-oriented culture dominant in much of the U.S.

The school offers educational programs for parents at the school and when we visited the school 20 parents were in attendance at a health education meeting.

This school is also more affected by what goes on at the district level than by school initiatives. For example, the district has a pre-K program with a beautiful new building. The intention of the superintendent is that students should be in a school environment that allows them to experience success before they even get to elementary school.

The school truly supported and affirmed the Mexican culture and Mexican-American culture of the community and speaking Spanish was not problematized by the school staff. The model of the school was definitely that of a traditional Mexican school. Because of this very influential characteristic of the school other schools would probably have a great deal of difficulty replicating the type of relationship that Kuwalski elementary has with the community.

C) Summary

The two schools described in this section are so embedded in the community that it is difficult to tell where the community ends and the school begins. There is a high level of personal familiarity between the schools and the families of the students they serve. The students in these schools seem to feel a strong sense of belonging, but the contexts of the schools are so traditional that it would seem to be nearly impossible to replicate them in post-industrial communities in the late Twentieth Century.

3) School as Locus for Learning Community

One school stood out as different from the other five schools in that it was situated in a fragmented and complex community, but had consciously not interacted with the community as a resource. Rather, it assumed a more proactive stance and was in the process of establishing itself as a center of a larger learning community that included parents, children, teachers, non-professional school staff and administrators. It did not solicit the business community for monetary contributions. Table 3 gives an overview of the school level, context, and rate of growth.

Table 3

Name of School	Type	Context	Growth
Esther Baker Rogers	Elementary	Rural	Moderate

A) Esther Baker Rogers Elementary School

Esther Baker Rogers exists in a rural area with a number of new colonias or poor residential areas with substandard housing and a high concentration of first generation Mexican immigrants. Thus, no intact neighborhoods exist and the new colonias are populated by people from various regions of Mexico and no prior knowledge of

each other and a low level of understanding of the dominant cultural context they have entered. So, for example, they usually do not understand the schools, the social service agencies, the language, or how society is organized or governed.

The administrative and professional staff at Rogers Elementary have a totally proactive stance toward their school's interaction with the community. The principal requires that teachers ride school buses at the beginning of the year to meet the families of the students in their own neighborhoods.

The school defines the community as parents, students, the school district central office, the middle school, and the research community (teachers are required to read relevant and recent research articles). Most notable was that the administrative group talked of their role in terms of creating a community of learners at the school.

The school seems to interact with the community on various levels. The support staff is directed to reflect on how they might contribute to the community of learners. The school nurse, for example became involved on parent-teacher nights by doing blood pressures and heights and weights, and she was also available to talk to parents about any health questions or concerns that they had.

The school counselor said that at one point she offered parenting skills classes to the students' parents, but this was not well received. Parents said they wanted instead education on AIDS, women's issues, discipline with teenagers, what they could do at home to support the education of their children, and how to keep their children off drugs and out of gangs.

The counselor talked about her role as crisis counselor, marriage counselor, and social worker. She talked empathetically about problems that parents have interacting with social service agencies. She takes the time to teach parents how social service agencies work, but she does not act as a direct advocate for parents. Rather, she sees herself as a resource to parents. She does not spend her days doing crisis referrals to agencies as the counselor at Elmer Sutherland does.

As far as getting parents involved in the school, the counselor says that the best way is to talk to them directly and personally, so that parents really get to know staff and teachers. She is clearly convinced that notes sent home with children and telephone calls have not worked in this regard.

The administrative staff is also pleased that they have finally been able to hire a parent coordinator who is able to be and do all that they would like. She is a former migrant worker with two years of college. Her ultimate goal is to become a teacher, and she has a high level of interpersonal skills. Her main goals are to organize community meetings in peoples' homes in order to initiate discussions about issues affecting the school and things that are going on in the school. The parent coordinator views herself as an intermediary between the parents and the school.

Recently, the administration and the teachers decided they were spending too much time and energy trying to raise extra funds for the school. Now the fundraising activities are mostly in the hands of the parents. Parents suggest what they want and the fundraising is directed toward those things whether or not they are the first

priority of the school staff. Because of this, parent interest in fundraising is maintained.

The principal and her staff are not satisfied with the academic progress they have made. She and her staff are now getting involved in developing a school-based clinic to serve the entire school community including staff, teachers, parents of students, students' non-school age siblings, and grandparents. The administrative staff has also been writing grants to acquire the technology they need to be able to communicate by e-mail with students and teachers and subject area experts over the internet. The other goal of the school is to become a year round school so that they can serve the community all through the year.

In effect then, parent education and empowerment as well as teacher and staff education and empowerment are the keys to understanding the vision of school-community interaction in this school. It is a community of learners with philosophy that "Children can't learn if parents aren't learning. And no one can learn if the teachers aren't constantly learning". It is clear that adult education provides an extremely important role in the operationalization of this community of learners.

Esther Baker Rogers takes a proactive leadership role in forging an integrated relationship with the community, and it does so in a fragmented, discontinuous complex society.

B) Summary

Rogers Elementary has transformed itself into a community and is reaching out to the disparate groups in their area to be a part of the community. The surrounding community is characterized by a lack of cohesion, organization, and sense of belong, and the school has invited those within the school to become stakeholders in the school and extended this invitation beyond the boundaries of the school to become stakeholders, as well. This has led to a focus on adult education based in the belief that everyone in the community needs to be engaged in the learning enterprise in order for the children to learn.

Discussion

Each of the schools described as interacting with the community as a resource serves a community that is fragmented and dealing with problems such as gangs, poverty, unemployment, single-parent families, and alienation. They continually are called on to serve more and more students with fewer and fewer resources. In order to augment these limited resources, they are working to acquire more resources from the communities in which they reside. Programs and activities typical of the schools that seem to interact with their communities primarily as a resource are adopt-a-school programs, social service advocacy, health care advocacy, and partnerships with universities.

What these schools are doing to form relationships with the community is very much in accordance with what is written in the research literature about school - community relationships. However, one of the major problems with this model is that it puts the schools in a dependency relationship with the community. What they are able to do and the programs that they implement are dependent on the uncertain generosity of specific groups and individuals. Funding for activities and projects can be cut off at any time without warning since the schools are not the ones who control the resources.

It is clear that the challenges of what has come to be called a postmodern society such as a high level of mobility, permeable national boundaries, and social fragmentation have created a situation whereby school and community are no longer integrated as part of their natural way of being in the world. Zaragoza High and Kuwalski Elementary provide a contrast to the challenges faced by most urban schools as they evoke a simpler and seemingly more coherent era. Their seemingly placid environments in which school and community appear seamlessly integrated might well be envied by schools functioning in more turbulent worlds. However, the explanation for how they have been able to do what they have done depends a great deal on their own unique social and cultural conditions. It is difficult to believe that "Leave it to Beaver" can be replicated today as they were in the 1950's and 60's.

Esther Baker Rogers is unique among the schools studied in that it functioned in the complex world characteristic of most urban schools without entering into a dependency relationship with the

surrounding community. Its proactive initiation of a learning community extending beyond school walls suggests a way of interacting with the community in a leadership rather than supplicant role.

In today's world, as evidenced by the belief that society's problems can be solved in the schools, schools are being expected to hold society together. In the process it appears as though many schools are being forced into a dependency role.

The models of school-community relationships that we observed have important implications for how we think about education and the boundaries that exist between schools and the communities in which they reside. In the past, the boundaries between school and community have been narrow and rigid. Now we are beginning to see that schools cannot educate kids when their parents are hurting. We have begun to see that some schools are moving out of a dependent relationship with the community to one which is more pro-active.

This kind of school is exemplified by the following characteristics:

1) The school is a resource for the entire community including children, parents, grandparents, and staff.

2) The school goes out into the community. Teachers and other school support staff go into the community to become aware of the context of the students and the families that they serve.

3) Adult education is a priority at these schools. Teachers, parents, administrators, and support staff must constantly be learning.

4) All stakeholders in the school must have the opportunity to contribute to the school and take risks.

5) The administration of the school must be truly collegial instead of hierarchical.

6) The stakeholders must constantly be communicating with one another in an effort to constantly evaluate what the school is doing.

We believe that Esther Baker Rogers elementary school offers an example of a school that has successfully created a sense of community within the school and within the region that it serves. This school has been able to do this in spite of the fact that it is located in a rural area where there are a number of new immigrants and where there are poor neighborhoods constantly being built.

Since the communities in the Valley are much more likely to resemble the community that Esther Baker Rogers serves, we believe that what this school is doing may offer the most promising practices and programs for those schools that want to improve their interaction with the community in which they exist.